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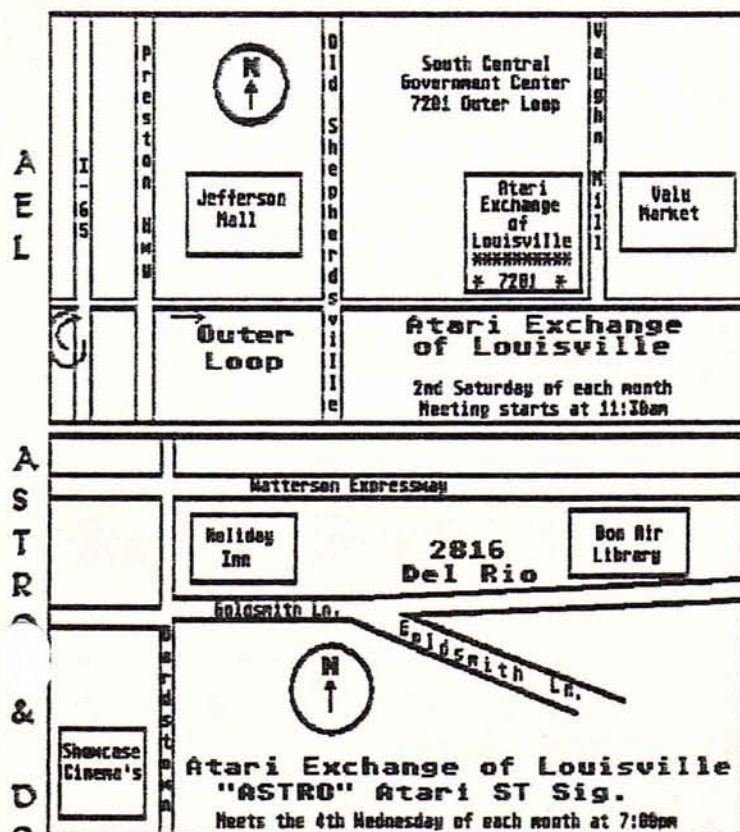
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AELien Transmissions!

Atari Exchange of Louisville's Information Exchange Newsletter

October, 1987

Atari Exchange of Louisville



Topic of the month:

Express!

Articles included:

BBS Express
850 Express
MPP Express

ST Articles:

ST Writer version 2
GFA Basic
Deskcart Part 1

DC Sig meetings are the 1st Wednesday of the month 7:00pm at the Bon Air Library. An 8-bit Sig.

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Any dues paying member of the Atari Exchange of Louisville may submit an article to the editor for publication. The deadline for submission is the last Saturday of each month. Articles may be edited and/or published at the discretion of the editor. Articles are best handled when submitted on disk or uploaded via modem. Get them to Jack Link, 7501 Sunset Lane, Crestwood, KY 40014 or send to the Atari Exchange of Louisville's ATARI SCENE BBS at (502) 964-2924. AtariWriter, ST Writer or ASCII format is preferable.

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Business Meeting

The Business Meeting for the Atari Exchange of Louisville is held on the 2nd Saturday of each month at the Central Jefferson County Government Center, 7201 Outer Loop, Louisville KY. The library opens for returns at 11:00am and the meeting begins at 11:30am. Dues for one year are \$20.00 per person/family. Membership includes monthly issues of AELien Transmissions (not mailed), access to the AEL software library, and priveleged access to the ATARI SCENE BBS.

DCSig Meeting

The DCSig meets on the 1st Wednesday of the month at the Bon Air Library, 2816 Del Rio Place at 6:30pm. This group is now becoming the place to discuss the Atari 8-bit computers.

ASTRO Sig Meeting

The ASTRO Sig meets to discuss the latest on the ST line of Atari computers. Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of each month, at 7:00pm, at the Bon Air Library on 2816 Del Rio Place. For additional information contact Jack Link at (502) 241-6678 or on the ATARI SCENE BBS.

For the finest Atari Bulletin Board in Kentucky, call the Atari Exchange of Louisville's

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AELien TRANSMISSIONS

The Information Exchange Newsletter of the Atari Exchange of Louisville

AEL Business Meeting Minutes

September 12, 1987

By Charles E. Crowder Jr.

The meeting was opened at 11:30 A.M. by Don Garr with yours truly in the position of Acting Secretary as the elusive Jody Estes was unable to attend due to work. The topic of the meeting was Atariwriter+ and ST-Writer.

Don then announced that next months topic would be on the Express! terminal and BBS programs and asked for some articles for the newsletter. Several people volunteered and we should have some interesting viewpoints in the next newsletter.

The raffle fundraiser is getting a good start. If you haven't picked up your share of the tickets, do so soon. The more tickets sold, the more software and support for the newsletter and BBS we can afford.

It was announced that the officers had voted to abolish the remission of dues for serving officers due to declining membership. It was placed up for a club vote and passed.

There were 3 pieces of software recommended for purchase at this meeting. They were:

GFA Basic - ASTRO

Alternate Reality: the Dungeon - DCSIG

Basic View - DCSIG

All 3 were voted on and passed. Jack Link announced that PC-Ditto had arrived for ASTRO and would be available for check out at the next meeting.

On the Atari News and Rumors front - FLASH! Atari Corp. announced on September 11th the long awaited SX212 300/1200 baud, fully Hayes compatible modem had finally been shipped to distributors. The bad news was that while the modem can work immediately with the ST's and 8-bits with some kind of RS232 interface (Atari 850, ICD P:R: Connection, etc), the eagerly awaited 8-bit SIO hookup and terminal software were not ready. When the 8-bit hookup is ready, it will be offered as a kit with the SIO connector and Keith Ledbetter's newest terminal program - SX Express! Price for the modem is under \$99. Price on the SIO kit is not certain.

At the same time Atari announced that the XEP80, 80 column adaptor was in limited release, while OSS has removed MAC/65 from production. Better get yours while they last!

Lloyd Bromwell then discussed the newest telephone services available. It was nice to know that this area is leading in something!

Jim O'Hara announced that VideoVisions had some new 8-bit software in, with SSI releasing Alternate Dagger. Rich Link gave the latest on the SSI purchase of the rights to TSR's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons game. That has to be the marketing coup of the year!

Rich Link put on a short demo on the advantages and disadvantages of using a modified version of Atariwriter+ with different DOS's. Thank you Rich for the interesting demonstration. It was announced at the meeting that the new version of ST-Writer was now available in the Public Domain.

This is the long awaited version 2.00 with GEM implemented, allowing for mouse control of the cursor and desk accessories.

The rest of the meeting was passed with Gary Brockie giving an excellent demo of the long maligned Commodore Amiga 1000. I think that I speak for everybody when I say that I was impressed with the machines capabilities. The graphics and sound were superb. Thanks Gary for taking the time to haul your system down there.

Topic of the Month

The EXPRESS! family of telecommunication programs.

BBS Express!

By Rich Link

The closest many people ever come to seeing and running a BBS is when they dial out of their homes to the local board. Rarely do they see what is involved in organizing and running a BBS. Being the Sysop of The Atari Scene has given me the opportunity to see first hand how a BBS is put together and operated.

When the AEL first set up a BBS, it was with BBCS from Antic. There was a word for that program.... garbage! The system was prone to crashing, required constant sysop work to keep the message bases from filling and in general was just unreliable.

A year and a half ago, we purchased BBS Express! from Orion Micro Systems. It was written by the same person who created the exceptional Express! term programs, Keith Ledbetter. Since that time, we have had one VERY consistent system. If it weren't for sysop screwups and power and hardware failures, we would have been up the entire time. From a sysop's point of view, I think it's great.

The system is organized as a program accessing datafiles. The system is organized like this:

1. BBS Program and Prompts
2. Userlog Data Files
3. Message Base Data Files
4. Help and Text Messages

To speed access, the userlogs and message bases are preallocated. To set them up, you use a utility program which essentially makes a full sized, blank file. As users are added, the BBS Express! simply fills in the blanks spaces. The message bases work the same way except that once they get full, it simply rewrites over the lowest number message. The sysop need not delete old messages on a daily basis.

The Help screens are simply ASCII or ATASCII text files which are "viewed" when the appropriate keys are pressed. To edit a menu, the sysop loads up a text editor or word processor and writes up a new one.

Of course the next important part of a BBS is the Download/Upload section. Express gives the ability to restrict access to programs by security level. You can have up to 9 levels of access for the message bases and downloads. This is done by setting a bit map in the users log file. Each bit is a level of access. So a security 1 user gets 10000000 and a security 31 user gets 11111000. You can also split access like 10111000. This would be security 29. He could not access level 2 files since the bitmap has a 0 there.

Downloads are set up in up to 8 different pathways. You could use floppy disks or use a hard disk with 8 partitions. When a program is uploaded, it is placed in the first available spot on the list. The caller gives an 8 letter name. He then tells the system the type of file (BASIC, Object, Text) and the form (8 Bit, ST, Utility, Game). It then generates an extension which is tacked on. For example GAME.BE5 on the Scene would be the program GAME in BASIC, for Eight Bit, level 5. There is no way to tack on extensive descriptions with the file to explain the way the program works. We have gotten around that by preparing a text file which is updated routinely and placed in the Library section.

Once the basic elements are in place, the system can be left to run on it's own if desired. New users can be given high

access upon logon or can be restricted until a sysop upgrades them. New uploads can be put into general access immediately or restricted as well. The Scene has been set up as a restricted system although it could be easily changed.

To get the most out of the program it is highly recommended that the BBS be set up using SpartaDOS. Using a DOS like Atari 2.0 or MyDOS causes some real problems with the message bases. They can't be moved around on the disk like normal files without going through a procedure called "Indexing". Since SpartaDOS uses an entirely different system of pointers, it can be manipulated without problem. This makes it possible to do nearly 90% of the system maintenance via remote access. For a club like the AEL where sysops can change with each yearly election, that can be a real feature.

So, what can't BBS Express! do that a sysop would want? First it cannot access online games. To do this, you must have the ability to chain to another program. Second, you can't set up things like surveys. There is no way to force users to respond to questions and log their replies. And finally, individual message bases are limited to 75 messages although each can contain up to 1750 bytes. For the more verbose users, messages can be continued.

Of course nothing is ever perfect. To get around these problems would require a total rewrite and restructure of the system. And that is what Keith Ledbetter is reported to have done with BBS Express! Professional. Reports are that it is set up in modules similar to SpartaDOS. The user essentially enters "DOS" commands which are then loaded and run. This would create a very SLOW board if it weren't for those nifty things called RAMDISKS. In fact it is almost a requirement for any board to have a ramdisk to save wear and tear on the drives.

If I had to give BBS Express! a 1 to 10 rating it would be a 9! It's easy to use even for a programming klutz like me. It can be easily modified within it's bounds and it runs like a tank. Just about like the terminal programs... except on the other end of the phone line.

850 Express!

by Gary L. Brockie

So you have an ATARI 850 or P:R: Connection, and a Hayes Compatible modem. What terminal program is best for you? I have used several terminal programs for the ATARI, and 850 Express! has proven to be the best.

850 Express! is a machine code terminal program that is configured to operate with Hayes compatible modems and the ATARI 850. 850 Express! basically operates in a manner similar to 1030 Express! However, 850 Express! offers some enhancements over 1030 Express.

850 Express! is compatible with DOS 2.0, DOS 2.5, and SpartaDOS. I don't own MYDOS, OS/A, or TOPDOS therefore I can't say for sure if 850 Express! will work with these Disk Operating Systems. 850 Express works beautifully with SpartaDOS 3.2! I have my 850 Express! disk set up with a startup batch file that configures my 130XE's RAMdisk, queries me for the current time and date, installs a time and date line at the top of the screen, and runs 850 Express!. At this point I have 850 Express! ready for use. 850 Express's compatibility with SpartaDOS means that I have the time of day on a line above the normal terminal screen of Express. The files that I capture and/or download are time and date stamped! Better yet, I have over 500 sectors of practically delay free upload/download space on my RAMdisk!

850 Express! has five screens. The first that you see is a control menu. This screen lets you access just about all of the options the program has to offer. The second screen is the terminal screen. The third display screen is the File Transfer status screen. The last two screens operate the automatic dialing functions.

The control screen lists all of the program options and gives the single letter command used to exercise 850 Express's options. From this screen you can choose the terminal settings (ATASCII/ASCII, parity, full/half duplex, and 300/1200/2400 baud, choose manual dialing or dial from a list). Standard DOS functions are also supported

(directory, format disk, rename, lock, unlock, and copy file). You may also specify a capture file. This allows you to copy to a disk file anything that you see on your terminal screen. For example, you could capture the list of all ATARI downloads on the ATARI Scene to a disk file. Then later, when you are off line you can print out the captured list and study it at your convenience. This is where SpartaDOS's time and date stamping proves useful, you can tell just by getting a directory with SpartaDOS how current these files are. Also from the control menu, you control Xmodem file transfer functions. Both standard Xmodem and Xmodem with CRC checking are supported.

The Terminal screen has two modes. First the standard terminal mode, which is 40 columns and 24 lines. The second mode is the "editor" mode. This allows you to have a small two line window at the bottom of the screen. This window allows you to edit your input using ATARI's built in screen editing functions without sending your input along until you have pressed return. This allows you to use the handy and familiar features of the ATARI screen editor while on-line, even if the BBS you are on-line with doesn't support the ATARI screen editor. From the Terminal screen you access the control menu by simply pressing the START button. You return to the terminal screen from the control menu by hitting RETURN at the control menu prompt. You can also capture small amounts of data in a 4K capture buffer at any time in the terminal mode by toggling the OPTION key. If you have defined a capture file from the control menu, the buffer is saved automatically to a file that you have specified when the buffer is full. Then the buffer is cleared and Express continues capturing data. Pressing OPTION enables/disables the automatic capture. Pressing START will save the remainder of the unsaved portion of the capture buffer, closes the capture file, and places the control menu on the screen. While on-line Express also displays an elapsed time meter that lets the user know how long you have been on line.

The File transfer status screen shows the user all the pertinent data of a Xmodem transfer. The user sees the filename, number of bytes transferred, number of Xmodem blocks transferred, type of file (yes, Express

tells you what kind of file is being transferred!), number of tries (if a bad block is detected), transfer status (sending, receiving, NAK rcvd, Waiting, etc.), and displays the ATASCII equivalent of the current data being transferred. I have found 850 Express's Xmodem transfers to be foolproof. I have never seen it drop a file, or have compatibility problems with any Xmodem BBS I have tried. Here again, SpartaDOS and 850 Express! really team up in an awesome fashion. I have the US Doubler enhanced 1050 disk drives. Sub-directories and high speed transfers to and from US Doubler drives are fully supported! The high speed of course is only used after I fill the even faster RAMdisk in my 130XE. (Imagine this setup with an MIO, and a Hard drive! Both of which SpartaDOS supports!)

The best should be saved for last. Probably my favorite feature of 850 Express is the dialing menu. A user can set up lists of BBS's for automatic dialing. From the dialing menu editing screen you create your BBS list(s). For each BBS you assign a name, terminal settings, and a phone number. You can now save this list to disk and load the list at any time from the dialing menu. The dialing menu shows all of the current list's BBS names, and a list of dialing options. To dial a BBS you simply select a BBS from the list with the cursor keys, and hit RETURN. The selected BBS will be dialed, and Express will wait for a carrier tone for a pre-selected number of seconds. You can abort the dialing and hang up by hitting any key. If no carrier tone is received Express hangs up and re-dials until you abort. Even better, with the cursor keys you can select any number of BBS's from the list and have Express dial them one at a time automatically until a connection is made! Neat!

In summary, 850 Express is the without question the best terminal program that I have ever used for the ATARI 8 bit computer. You get convenience, speed, and flawless Xmodem transfers. 850 Express is a shareware program, and I encourage anyone who decides to use this program to send its author the recommended donation. Someone who can write software of this quality should be encouraged to write more software for the 8 bit ATARI!!!

MPP Express!

by Joe Mattingly

Having purchased an MPP modem, the first thing I found out was the "Smarterm" software that came with it was junk! Downloading with Smarterm was risky at best, and if you had to download directly to the drive, Lord help you!

Enter "MPP EXPRESS!", Keith Ledbetter's 1030 term program, converted for use on the MPP1000E. Until this program came along, I literally wasted hours on useless downloads, hoping for one good one! MPP EXPRESS! works with DOS 2, 2.5, and SPARTA DOS. (these are the only DOS' that I have tried) Ram disk owners can use the "RD D8" in SPARTA DOS, and 2.5 users "Ramdisk.com."

Bootup MPP EXPRESS!, and you will see the top portion of the main menu. Using single key strokes to manipulate most of the settings makes life easy! For example, one can set "ASCII or ATASCII" for one to one callers, baud can be set, parity can be set, etc... Also you can set dial tone delay, digit and pulse delay, and time for connection as well.

DOS functions are fully included, with a few nice touches such as "view file" which will let you see a file on the screen with minimal effort. The default drive can be set from 1 to 8 for receiving or sending, and if you like your settings, you can keep them with the "save defaults" command. Using the control arrow keys, one can brighten or darken the screen from a light green to black, or lighten or darken the text on the screen.

There are two downloading protocols in MPP EXPRESS!, one is "Xmodem", which one can start by simply pressing "R" for receive. To send, press "S". In either case, you will be prompted for a file name. The other protocol is "ASCII" which folks use for transfer of text files or "screen captures." To receive in ASCII, use "T" or to send in ASCII, use "U" (note that this is to and from the disk!) Now comes the good part, the role of the buffer. MPP EXPRESS! has a buffer of

about 6K. While this is not very large, it doesn't have to be. If you are doing a download, MPP EXPRESS! will send data to the buffer. When the buffer is full, it writes the data to the disk, (or printer, or screen) then purges the buffer and goes back for more. Sending a file works the same way in reverse.

When MPP EXPRESS! boots up, it also loads your initial "PHONE.LST" file with your board info. To see what you have hit the "D" (dial from list) and you go to the directory of your board numbers. Use the arrow keys to move about the numbers, and hit "RETURN" for the dialing of the high-lighted entry. From this menu, you can add, edit, delete, and look at entries. To add an entry, hit "A" and you will see another sub-menu. You can enter the board name (up to 17 characters), telephone number, up to three macro commands, connect time, ASCII or ATASCII, and baud rate. With the MPP, the baud rates run as follows, 297, 300, 400, and 450. If you run out of room for boards, then "save" "PHONE.LST" and clear the list ("C") then start all over, but save THIS list as "PHONE2.LST" and so on, and so on.

A word on macros... You are allowed three macros for EACH phone number! For example, if I have macro 1 (in PITSTOP) as "KLINGON" (don't include the parenthesis!) and I have made contact with the PITSTOP, and it has asked me my password, then I hit SHIFT/CONTROL/1, to send "KLINGON" as my password! SHIFT/CONTROL/2 or 3, sends the other two macros.

There are a few other "little" things that make this a wonderful program, and if "ya'll come" to the D.C.S.I.G. (plug! plug!) I would be glad to show you! Anyway, if you have an MPP 1000E, get MPP EXPRESS! You will be glad you did!

ASTRO Sig

Atari ST Resource Organization

by Jack Link

Once again I think we had a very interesting and informative meeting. Besides displaying a few of the latest demo programs such as LCD, Charles Crowder and Don Garr gave some pretty heavy opinions between Regent Base and d8man. In fact, there was so much interest in these programs, Charles has agreed to host a database programming SIG after the AEL business meetings. The first of these will be in November.

I would like to welcome Rick Ward and Joe Bradley as new members of the AEL and the ASTRO Sig. Rick was a member back in the early days of the AEL and Joe can oftentimes be found on the Atari Scene. Please let us know how we can make your membership as useful as possible.

PC Ditto is now in the library. All indications are that this is a truly remarkable PC emulator for the ST. If you find this program suitable for your needs to run IBM compatible programs, please support the authors by purchasing a copy. PC Ditto greatly enhances the power and flexibility of the ST. If any of you use PC Ditto with specific programs such as WordPerfect, Lotus 1-2-3, etc., we would love to see a demonstration and hear your opinions.

Louis Kuhl is beginning to work on the ASTRO public domain library and Charles Crowder has offered to coordinate the production of a series of beginner's disks. We are soliciting articles on any topic that would be of interest to beginning ST users.

I am beginning my latest hardware hack; the building of a hard drive based on the ICD Host Adapter. Based on the parts I have purchased so far, it will have either a 40 or 65 meg capacity. After the project is finished, I will follow up with a newsletter article and a demonstration at the Sig meeting sometime in the future. Hopefully the results and final cost will make the project worthwhile.

See you at the next meeting!

STate of the Software Art

by Charles E. Crowder Jr.

Contributing Editor - ASTRO SIG

Well, it's finally here. The new GEM version of ST Writer has arrived in the Public Domain and it is pretty decent. It lacks a lot of the bells and whistles that many of the commercial programs offer but is a good solid offering that allows the user full control of his work.

The program boots much as the earlier versions did, showing the standard title screen, however, click one of the mouse buttons and a dialog box comes that allows you to enter the GEM mode. Editing a document is done on the same screen as before and this shows one of the problem areas of the program. Because the program uses the same non-GEM editing as before, interactive spelling checkers such as Thunder do not work. However, other accessories, such as a clock, alarm, printer spooler, etc. are available from the GEM window so all is not lost.

Using the mouse shows one other problem. To use the mouse you must double click it to choose a command because the mouse pointer disappears on the first click and reappears on the second click. This is more annoying than serious and should be fairly easy to eliminate. Considering version 2.0 was released less than 2 months after version 1.75, it is not surprising that a few problems have appeared.

For editing, the mouse can move the cursor around the screen, page up or down, etc. However, there is no use made of some of the more advanced GEM techniques to work with text, such as the "Rubber Band" method of selecting blocks of text. Rather the older keyboard method is used with the exception that the cursor can be moved by the mouse.

Most of the other keyboard commands are disabled in the mouse mode, so selection of commands from the title screen is accomplished from the GEM title bar instead. As the title bar is not at the top of the screen

when editing a document, you must return to the GEM window to use any of the GEM commands.

Mostly, I like the program. I feel that some compromises were made to accommodate both GEM and non-GEM versions in one package, but it shows a real effort to make a usable program. The only problems are minor considering what it takes to convert a non-GEM program to GEM format and still maintain compatibility with the older versions. I will probably continue to use this program until WordPerfect ST or Microsoft (Atari) Write becomes available.

Dr. Noonan is to be congratulated and thanked for keeping a good product alive and free to the ST users who otherwise would have been stuck with 1st Word.

ST Basic Tips

We all know that ST Basic is seriously flawed, especially in the math functions. Some are simply its inability to do basic math operations. Others are more serious, causing the system to crash without warning. Most are just annoying to the user, for example, the way the letters change to the skewed, lightened font when you make a change in the editing screen.

Well, I thought I would share some of the flaws to avoid, and some other tips to make programming a little easier in ST Basic. I know that GFA Basic is better, but everybody has ST Basic since it is free with the system.

Flaws

ST Basic has some very serious flaws. Most are simply math error, but some can crash the system, causing a lot of frustration. Here are some of the better known ones:

Arrays: Before putting arrays into a program, the entire set of arrays MUST first be cleared with 0 or a null string. Otherwise, a number will be received.

Accuracy: The accuracy of the math functions is very inconsistent. Division such as 53/100

results in 0.529999 rather than 0.53. Simple commands such as PRINT 8.4 won't execute accurately.

Variable Declaration: This is a strange one. Declaring values between 77312 (e.g. x=77312) and 77823 results in the FUNCTION NOT YET DONE error message. Worse, some values (e.g. x=77500) cause ST Basic to crash and then lock up the system as soon as the mouse pointer is moved.

GOTOXY (Hi res mode only): This divides the column position by 2 (e.g. cursor is at column 10 - program indicates column 5).

INP: This command can only be interrupted by pressing <CONTROL>C and moving the mouse simultaneously and some of the functions are not functional or only partially functional. For example, INP -4, keyboard status check doesn't work, while INP -2, console status check works randomly for the keyboard.

LINE INPUT#: This command doesn't recognize the EOF(n) function, resulting in an error.

ON ERROR GOTO: When this command is used, an EOF (end of file) results in a system crash.

OPTION BASE: This command doesn't work at all.

VAL: The VAL function gives a nullstring with the last VAL value. This would be right if the output were a 0.

INKEY\$: This function doesn't work.

String Functions:

Although ST Basic allows more than 127 characters, any characters in a string beyond that amount may not be readable by the LEFT\$/MID\$/RIGHT\$ functions. It is best to limit strings to less than 127 characters.

"Hidden" keywords: ST Basic apparently has trouble differentiating some strings from non-existent keywords. For example FNCS will return a Reserved Keyword error.

Opening a file for input: When opening a file, the pointers tend to get scrambled the first time. Always open, close and then open the file again. This will reset the pointers properly.

ST Basic Tips

Here are a few tips to help you program in ST Basic:

Edit Mode Ghost Characters: Are you tired of trying to read the ghost characters used when changes are made in the Edit Mode screen? This simple poke will allow you to change the skewed/lightened character font for one that is easier to read.

POKE SYSTAB+2,x

Replace x with one of the following bits to change the character font:

Bit	Function
0	Normal
1	Bold
2	Lightened
4	Skewed
8	Underlined
16	Reverse Video

Combinations of the different styles can be obtained by adding the bits together, although some combinations won't work for obvious reasons, i.e., no lightened/bold text.

Retrieving a keypress: ST Basic has a built-in command to retrieve a single keypress (INKEY\$), but it doesn't work. There is another way but it causes as much of a problem since it causes the program to return to the Command Window to obtain the keypress. Thus you have the Command Window flashing in and out when keypresses are called for.

However, there is a solution to this problem. Instead of using A\$=INPUT\$(1) which will flip between the Command and Output windows, use a simple INPUT A\$ and then compare for the value as follows:

```
100 ? "PRESS ANY KEY and RETURN";:INPUT A$
110 IF A$="Y" OR A$="y" THEN ? "YOU PRESSED Y":END
```

In the above example, if you press Y or y then the program will print a message and end, otherwise it will simply end.

Determining the resolution: Would you like your program to be able to determine if the system is running in the correct resolution before running? Then this simple code will help you.

```
100 A=PEEK SYSTAB+0:PRINT A
```

This little line will return one of the following values:

- 1 = High resolution
- 2 = Medium resolution
- 4 = Low resolution

By doing a comparison, the program can decide if the system is in the correct resolution and either proceed or abort to a message.

I hope these few tips help. I have a few more and if anybody is interested, let me know and I will publish them. Next month will also, begin a tutorial on DBman command file programming.

GFA Basic v2.0

by David Brown

In this review I would like to go over a few of the main points of GFA Basic. I wish I could talk about all of the features but then there would be no more room for any of the other articles.

Speed: GFA Basic is known for its amazing speed. As an example, a For - Next loop to 10,000 takes only .47 seconds. What good is that? Well that kind of speed will allow you to do many things faster, not just For - Next loops, the overall speed of GFA Basic is like that of C or Pascal.

GEM Programming: GFA Basic works very close with GEM, you can make windows (Up to four at a time), put names on them, and print text in them. Icon boxes are a simple one line statement. You can also make MENU bars with GFA (Those are the things sometimes called "Drop Down" MENUS).

Structured language: GFA Basic is a structured language. Unlike ST-Basic it has NO line numbers. This at first is very frustrating. But after time you grow used to the structured language, And you will even begin to like it more!

GFA & Internals: GFA Basic also supports Bios, Xbios, VDI, GEM, and all of the other internal commands. This is good for things like changing cursor blink speed and other unusual things like that.

Example

This program will print a number in the top left corner of the screen and it will grow to 100, at 50 the program will print "The program is at 50". The first example is in ST-Basic, the second is in GFA.

ST-Basic version:

```
10 Fullw 2:Clearw 2
20 For X = 1 to 100
30 Gotoxy 1,1
40 ?X
50 If X = 50 then ?"X equals 50"
60 Next X
```

GFA Basic version:

```
Cls
For X = 1 to 100
  ?At(1,1);X
  If X = 50 then
    ?"X equals 50"
  Endif
Next X
```

Notice that GFA only has one command per line, this is so your program won't get messy like normal Basics do.

GFA Basic cost \$79.95 (Can be found cheaper) from Michtron. It comes with one disk with GFA Basic, A Public Domain Run-Time module and a number of demo programs. Other programs that can be purchased for GFA Basic are:

GFA Basic compiler
GFA Vector (Makes 3-D pictures for use with GFA Basic)

You will find many PD GFA Basic programs on CompuServe. (This program is so good that CIS has made a GFA sig). I think this is the best programming language, for the money, out for the ST. For some PD examples call the Twilight Zone BBS at 502-456-4403.

Editor's Note: Because of the length of this article, what does not fit in this issue will be continued next month.

CHRISTMAS IN JULY (or "My Latest ST Toy")

by Louis Kuhl

I recently purchased for my "ST" a little gadget that plugs into the cartridge slot which, until now has been as useless as hair on a billiard ball. I call it a "Toy" because it's something I really don't NEED, but it looked like it would be one of those "neat" things to have if only for the novelty of it. After only a couple of weeks with the device I'm not sorry I purchased it and, judging from the interest shown by some of the people at the last meeting of the ST SIG, I thought that some other ST owners might be interested in learning something about this handy-dandy little plaything.

The device is called "DeskCart!" and is put out by Quantum Microsystems Inc. and what it does is allow the owner to access 14 desktop accessories while giving up only a few bytes of precious RAM. The accessories are on ROM in the cartridge and only an "access" program must be loaded into RAM upon boot-up. With the accessories on ROM we are no longer saddled with the usual six accessory limit, and if my calculations are correct, that leaves me with five remaining accessory "slots" should I ever find a need for something that is not included in the ROM cartridge. Here is a very brief rundown on what the device offers.

First and foremost, DeskCart has a battery operated time and date function. Plug in DeskCart, set the time (to the second) and date and forget about ever resetting these values for the life of the lithium battery.

October 1987

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7 Wed DCSig 6:30	8	9	10 Business Meeting 11:30
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 Officer's Meeting 7:00	22	23	24
25	26	27	28 ASTRO Sig 7:00	29	30	31

(Estimated to be about 3 to 5 years.) That's something I've drooled about ever since I purchased my ST!

But wait, that is NOT one of the 14 accessories! That's just the icing on the cake. The first ACC, in the order they appear when you pull down the menu under DESK on the Menu Bar, is a calendar. Select this function and a calendar appears showing the present month (read from the internal clock), with the present date in red. Want to see last month's calendar? Click on the LEFT arrow. To advance a month, click on the RIGHT arrow. Same month last year? Click on the UP button. Get the idea? Nothing could be more simple. You can also use the SLIDE BARS for bigger leaps between the years 1940 and 2040.

But that's not all. This same function has an Appointment Book feature. Want to make yourself a note that your AEL dues need to be paid next month? Click on the appropriate date (or some date in advance

the meeting date), and the first thing you are greeted with upon booting up on the given date is your reminder. If you have entered a "time" for the occurrence and happen to be in the midst of some other activity on the computer when the "time" arrives, an alarm is sounded! An appointment book format is already in place with month & date already entered for you. Just add time, subject and comments and the record is Saved when you Close.

Second, there is a Notebook. Select this and you can write yourself a note or notes on anything you might want. SAVE the notes to disk, LOAD them, PRINT them, FIND them or ERASE them. (Handy for those of us with short memories.)

Third, there is what DeskCart calls a Card File. It is a mini database where you can store anything that can be indexed. Stuff that one would have stored on index cards in BC times, (Before Computers.) I plan to catalog my Magazines with it. It could be handy to have that record where it is always available while I'm using the computer.

Fourth is the Calculator. Call this up and you are presented with a representation of a desktop calculator. It's operation is keyed to the ST's separate numeric keypad and couldn't be easier to use. It is quasi scientific in that it has trig and log functions, but I was disappointed to find that it does not have an "inverse" feature for these functions, thus making them almost useless in my opinion. I have written QMI about this and they say that they plan to correct this in a future upgrade. (\$10.00) However, it does have direct conversion from Decimal to Hexadecimal and back which could be handy for programmers and other "technics".

Stay tuned for next month's exciting conclusion!